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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR DICARLO, EUR/SCE HOH, SAINZ, BALIAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: GOC WELCOMES RIGA LANGUAGE, PROMISES CONTINUED

REFORMS

**¶11.** (U) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: On November 30, MFA State Secretary Hidajet Biscevic expressed to Charge d'Affaires the

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GoC's appreciation of the positive assessment of Croatia in both the Riga communique and President Bush's speech. "We think Riga was a joint step forward," he said, stressing the GoC's commitment to continue all necessary reforms.

**¶12.** (U) Media reaction was mixed, with front-page headlines ranging from "Green Light for Croatia in NATO!" in the government daily to "Only a Third of Croats for NATO" in the most right wing paper. The GoC will now try to build on the communique's promise of invites to qualified candidates in 2008 and boost problematic public support for Alliance membership. Post is extending active assistance to the GoC in this effort. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

PRESS MIXED, "RESPECTABLE CROATS" PLEASED

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**¶13.** (U) Pro-NATO press commentaries were extremely positive, calling the Riga Summit one of Croatia's greatest international successes. Negative commentaries primarily revealed the public's lack of understanding of NATO and the Alliance's mission, repeating popular fears about the cost of NATO membership in terms of money, soldiers, and sovereignty. News of the first Croatian soldier wounded in Afghanistan on November 24 seemed to push the usual NATO-naysayers to new extremes, prompting one to call the new NATO "a war alliance to conquer oil and gas."

**¶14.** (U) Biscevic dismissed these negative press commentaries, stressing that USG and allied support for Croatia is "very much appreciated by our government, our ministry, and all respectable Croats." The GoC plans to issue a formal statement regarding Riga later today. Biscevic added that the pace of military modernization and reform will continue, including GoC plans to increase Croatia's contribution to NATO forces in Afghanistan to 200 troops in 2007.

**¶15.** (SBU) Biscevic noted that the communique's offer of Partnership for Peace membership to BiH, Montenegro, and Serbia will open new regional cooperation opportunities for Croatia.

DELAWIE